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ABSTRACT

This paper offers advice for ways in which community colleges can approach the challenge of recruiting international students. Community colleges are enjoying a new popularity with overseas students, even though other higher education programs are showing slow growth for this group. According to the paper, it is becoming more common to find community colleges among the universities at educational fairs held in various countries throughout the year. Colleges that recruit foreign students must be prepared to provide services for these students. Services include sending pre-arrival information; implementing an adequate orientation program; making health insurance available; providing assistance in finding housing; and offering academic and immigration advisement. ESL classes, social and cultural adjustment help, and personal counseling. Spending large amounts of money on marketing is not always necessary; word of mouth can be a powerful recruiting tool. Brochures and other school materials can be given to traveling professors and domestic and international students. In addition, there are dozens of Web sites that will carry an institution's homepage for a nominal charge. (NB)

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The Recruiting Game: Community Colleges Step Up To The Plate

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The Recruiting Game: Community Colleges Step Up to the Plate

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According to a recent edition of Open Doors, the annual report on international educational exchange published by the Institute of International Education, the number of international students attending colleges and universities in the United States increased by 14.4% from 1993 to 1999. During the same time period, the report noted, there was a 40% jump in the number of these students enrolled in community college programs.

In other words, while four-year programs, intensive English programs, and graduate studies departments are showing slow growth nationwide, community colleges and two-year institutions are enjoying a new popularity with foreign students. Prospective students in other countries are beginning to discover what Americans have known for several generations—community colleges are one of the best deals going in post-secondary education. The dark cloud of economic difficulties hanging over some countries may turn out to have a silver lining for community colleges as prospective students look for value and bargains in American institutions.

There are, of course, multiple reasons for the recent growth, but part of it at least is due to the increased activity of community colleges in the recruitment arena. While recruitment and marketing were at one time considered incompatible with the mission of most community colleges, more and more of them are showing an amazing amount of savvy in this highly competitive venture.

Evidence of this trend can be found by browsing through one or more of the guidebooks or magazines that promote American higher education to prospective students overseas. Also revealing is the list of participants at some of the educational fairs held in various foreign countries throughout the year. It is more and more common to find community colleges alongside the big players from well-known private and public four-year institutions.

Many more community colleges are just beginning to take a look at the potential of the international student market. Before jumping onto the bandwagon, however, there are a few points they need to ponder to make sure they are ready to play this exciting but sometimes risky game.

First of all, a community college should have a clear mission or goal in mind for bringing foreign students to the campus. For example, the college administration may believe that foreign students will boost the college's enrollment and thereby improve their "bottom line." Depending upon the college or state's tuition policies, foreign students may indeed bring added and welcome revenues to the campus. The faculty may have an entirely different motivation, such as wanting to add a more diverse, cosmopolitan element to the

student body. Whatever the reason for stepping up the recruitment of foreign students, the institution should recognize that such a plan entails a concomitant responsibility.

An institution that goes out its way to attract and admit foreign students has an ethical obligation to provide services to these students once they accept the offer of admission. Services include the sending of pre-arrival information, implementation of an adequate orientation program, making health insurance available, providing assistance to find suitable housing, academic and immigration advising, and personal counseling, if needed. There are many other provisions that foreign students may also find helpful, such as help with transportation, special English or ESL classes, social and cultural adjustment, or maybe even an "International Club." How to provide all of these services within the college's administrative structure is primarily a campus-based decision, but establishing an international student program with a full-time advisor is certainly one option that ought to be considered.

An excellent resource for guidance on these issues is a NAFSA publication entitled, Foreign Student Education at Two-Year Colleges: A Handbook for Administrators and Educators, by William O'Connell (1994). This book should be standard issue to any two-year institution considering the establishment or expansion of an international student program. There are chapters on every aspect of setting up a program from start to finish. The appendices include a recommended reading list and the NAFSA Code of Ethics. This book is highly recommended to anyone working with foreign students at a community college.

Conferences sponsored by NAFSA: The Association of International Educators are another great source of information and help. Through the workshops, presentations, exhibits, and informal networking, professionals can receive countless valuable tips on starting and running a program. Recruitment as a topic of discussion is more and more prevalent at NAFSA conferences these days, whether at the state, regional, or national level.

Once the decision to recruit and retain international students has been made, there are several proven strategies these institutions can employ to get the word out that they welcome international students. Many colleges are under the impression that recruitment of international students is prohibitively expensive. While it is true that certain community colleges and two-year institutions budget thousands of dollars for recruitment activities, there are some strategies that don't require a huge outlay of resources.

It is a well-known axiom of international student offices and intensive English programs that "word of mouth" is the best form of recruitment. It is also probably the cheapest. Using the students currently enrolled in your program is a cost-effective way to get the word out. Offer to provide them with brochures and applications for their friends and relatives back home. Don't stop there. Make sure your domestic students know about your program. When American students travel or study abroad, they could be encouraged to carry some of your materials with them. Traveling faculty can also be approached to represent the college. Almost everyone who goes overseas for any length

of time is asked for information about opportunities to study in the USA. Of course, word-of-mouth recruiting works best when your current international students are enjoying their experiences on your campus. Make sure that they are happy and then encourage them to help you admit more students from their home country.

Another standard approach that doesn't have to break your budget is to get your institution listed in guidebooks and references consulted by overseas clients. Many of these listings are free. Peterson's Guide, for example, lists most of the colleges and universities in the United States. There are several guidebooks published in Japan that list American institutions. These listings do not cost anything. Of course placing an ad or having a special feature listing in these publications will involve a charge.

Overseas Advising Centers are another good place to be listed and to have your materials on display. There is no charge for this service, as these centers are eager to have your information. The only costs to your institution are any mailing charges involved in sending catalogs, brochures and applications to addresses outside the United States, though a few such centers use APO or FPO addresses.

To use a direct mail strategy for recruiting students you first have to get the names and addresses of prospective students. You may consider subscribing to an address label service such as Peterson's International Student Search Service. For a subscription fee you will receive monthly a set of mailing labels addressed to students overseas who have expressed an interest in an institution like yours. You are allowed to set the parameters of the "matches" you receive. This service is not cheap, but it can be a highly effective way to reach students. It is suggested that in such cases you mail the student a small, lightweight card or letter inviting them to follow up with a reply. Mailing all potential students a heavy admissions packet is not cost effective.

The internet has become the recruiting tool of choice in many international student offices. It is quick, easy, cheap and highly effective. Like any new technology, however, it takes time to set up and utilize properly. There are dozens of websites around the world that will carry your institution's homepage for a nominal charge. Whether or not they are worthwhile is another question. If you are offered a free listing you should probably check it out and then, if it seems OK, go ahead with it. If the listing or link is not free, be more cautious. Go only with well-known, established organizations. If you have doubts, try contacting your colleagues at institutions already listed on the site. They can usually tell you how reputable the outfit is and how effective the site is in producing prospective students. The internet is here to stay and its use in promoting international education opportunities will only continue to grow in the coming years.

Your recruitment materials say a lot about your institutional commitment to international education. Make sure your materials are attractive, lightweight, easy to read and understand. Have someone with an ESL background check the text for readability and user-friendly vocabulary. Work with someone skilled in design and layout in order to achieve a uniform, consistent, professional look to your materials. Many schools have found that a special international student application makes the admission process easier

for this population to understand. Avoid inserting photocopied or poorly printed addenda to your domestic application materials. If your institution charges an application fee for international students, try to get the fee dropped or waived to encourage more applicants. Include in your materials a clear list of expenses and a school year calendar so students can make realistic plans.

Recruiting trips can be a highly effective way to increase your school's international exposure. Though these trips are probably one of the more expensive recruitment strategies, they often more than pay for themselves when you succeed in attracting a few students from a region that was under-represented on your campus. Even more valuable than the increased enrollment is the experience in seeing a country or region first-hand to get a deeper understanding of the educational, social, cultural and economic background of the students.

Placing advertisements in some of the international magazines and booklets is probably the most expensive form of recruitment that a school can undertake. It is easy to spend tens of thousands of dollars annually on attractive ads in full-color publications that are distributed free of charge to prospective students throughout the world. If your institution is interested in purchasing ad space in one or more of these publications, start by looking at the ads already placed by other similar schools. Ask your colleagues at those institutions about their ad's effectiveness. Start out with just one ad focused on one particular region of the world where your institution is under-represented. It pays to have professional help in designing and laying out your ad copy. Keep text to a minimum and provide clear information on how your office can be contacted.

The stand-up comedian jokes about taxi drivers and Seven-Eleven owners notwithstanding, community colleges have right in their backyards a tremendous resource for recruiting that is highly effective, dependable, and relatively inexpensive. America is still a nation of immigrants. Immigrant communities can be found in virtually every American city big enough to be on a map. In Glendale, Arizona and on the west side of Phoenix, for example, there are sizable groups of immigrants from Korea, Taiwan, the Middle East, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Russia, Romania, west Africa, India, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, China, and the list goes on. Once these immigrants get settled, find jobs, and begin to prosper, they become very interested in bringing their families and friends over from their home country to live with them and study at the local community college. Glendale Community College has students from countries almost never represented at large universities because of this phenomenon. In a recent semester there were students from Burma, Eritrea, Mali, Nigeria, Fiji, Vietnam, Romania, Korea, Taiwan and dozens of other countries—all due to contacts made through the local immigrant communities.

It doesn't take much to tap into this resource. You can have flyers made up and distributed at local ethnic restaurants, food stores, shops, churches, temples, or mosques. Many groups publish their own newsletters or newspapers in which you can place an ad for a fraction of what larger publications charge. Drop your business card off whenever you patronize an ethnic restaurant or shop. Get to know the people where you take your

dry cleaning, where you have your hair cut, where you stop for a "big slurpee," or whatever. Let them know how easy it is for someone to sponsor a person on a student visa. Be creative by letting sponsors pledge room and board support as part of the financial documentation. Talk about word of mouth! They will start coming to you.

Don't forget to turn over one last stone—any other educational institutions in your area, including four-year public and private universities, intensive English programs, high schools, boarding schools, graduate schools, and technical schools. Cultivate good relations with key personnel at those institutions. Call them periodically to chat and let them know how much you appreciate it whenever they refer a prospective student to you. Collegiality, not competition, benefits everyone. Attend all local, state, regional and national NAFSA meetings, workshops, and conferences. Talk to your colleagues at other institutions to find out what recruiting strategies work for them.

Finally, set up a system in your office to monitor the efficacy of each and every recruiting strategy that you try. Logging in calls, letters, e-mails, etc. may seem like a lot of work, but you will need to know the source of every contact made with your office. Sooner or later one of your supervisors is going to ask why your budget needs a line for advertising or printing. The only way to justify what you're doing is to show results. You can also use hard data to bargain with advertisers and negotiate a better price. These are simple business decisions made with clear evidence.

Your monitoring system may be as simple as a paper and pencil log or a far more elaborate computer database. Community colleges and other two-year institutions around the country have a lot of catching up to do in the recruiting game. But we also have a lot to offer international students. So let's suit up, step up to the plate, and start playing in the big leagues.

Once the students have started to flow into your college you need to begin offering services tailored to this special constituency. The following article outlines some of the services that international students can expect to find on most community college campuses. The article was written for prospective international students, but it may be instructive for community colleges considering how far they should go in the way of providing services to international students.

At Your Service:

What International Students Should Expect From a Community College

For the past few years, the fastest growing enrollments of international students in the United States have taken place on the campuses of America's community colleges. One of the great treasures of American higher education, the community college system has now begun to be discovered by students from all over the world who see the advantages of institutions that are convenient, affordable, innovative, and ready to admit students from other countries.

Community colleges are located in virtually every population center in the United States—from small towns in rural areas to the downtown campuses in large cities. They offer a variety of academic and vocational programs. They also offer a wide range of services to very diverse student populations. And increasingly, they are seeking to attract foreign students by offering special services to this unique population. What services can international students expect to find at a community college, and which of these services are often found nowhere except at a community college?

To answer these questions, it might be best to begin with the services that are <u>not</u> usually offered by community colleges. For example, unlike many universities and four-year colleges, community colleges generally do not have on-campus housing.

The most common type of housing at universities is often a shared room in a dormitory or "dorm," (also referred to as a residence hall). Some residence halls are quite plain, but the rooms are comfortable and cheap and give students a taste of the traditional American college experience. Since community colleges are often "commuter schools" within commuting distance for students living in the surrounding urban or suburban areas, most of them do not have on-campus housing of any kind. Students attending community colleges live in the local community, usually with their families. The only public community colleges that typically have dormitories are located in remote rural areas far away from population centers. These colleges have to provide housing because their students come long distances to attend classes. This is particularly true in the wide-open spaces of the western United States.

Another service that you might not find at a community college is the health center. On many university campuses, students who feel ill or who have a health problem can go to a

campus clinic. They may be treated by a registered nurse or other health care provider. Most large universities have full-time doctors on the staff who can treat students for any number of ailments or medical problems.

But community colleges tend not to have large health clinics. Many community colleges have no medical staff at all. Students who need to see a doctor do what anyone else in the community would do—they find medical services in the community. By not operating dormitories and clinics, community colleges save money. The savings are then passed on to the students in the form of lower tuition and fees.

Some of the services that both universities and community colleges provide are listed below. Please note that this list is by no means comprehensive, but it provides a checklist for international students who want to compare what is available at different institutions.

- Orientation Programs: Most colleges and universities that welcome foreign students provide some kind of orientation program for new students. These programs may last anywhere from half a day to a week or more. You should find out if the institution you want to attend has an orientation program, and if so, how long does it take and what does it include? A well-organized orientation program is a good indication of a higher quality international student program.

- Academic Advising: What is more important than getting good advice about how to achieve your academic goals in the most efficient manner possible? Because academic advising is so critical, it is probably the most widely used service offered on most campuses. All students have questions that only well-trained academic advisors can answer. It is important that you find out how to get the most out of the academic advisors wherever you decide to enroll.

- Immigration Advising and Processing: This is another critical "must" for international students. The ins and outs of U.S. immigration laws and policies are sometimes baffling. A good foreign student advisor can guide you through and help you avoid making costly mistakes. Conversely, a poor advisor can have a negative impact on your entire future.

- Health Insurance Program: As medical costs climb higher in the USA, it is absolutely essential to have insurance coverage for accidents, injuries, or serious illnesses. Many colleges and universities require international students to purchase a particular health insurance plan. Find out in advance what the policy is and be prepared to pay for insurance. It is much better to have it and not use it than to lack insurance and find yourself with astronomical medical bills to pay.

- International Students Association: If the college or university has any sizable population of international students, chances are good that there is an association. Some campuses even have associations for students from one

particular country, for example, a Korean students association or a Chinese students club. If there is a club, join it and support it by your participation. You will have some of the best and most memorable experiences of your life!

- Personal and Career Counseling: What do you want to major in? What are the "hot" careers? What future jobs suit your personality, aptitude and interests? What can you do about chronic depression or irrational fears? Is your boyfriend or girl friend treating you right? You can get help with all of these questions at the college or university's counseling center. Don't be afraid to make use of this service. It's there for you and the professional staff there will talk to you as an adult in complete confidentiality.

- Food Service: Practically every institution has a cafeteria where you can grab a bite to eat, have coffee with your friends, or stop between classes to have a cold drink. Large campuses tend to offer more choices of menu, payment plans, and meal options.

- Transportation: Some universities and colleges offer free shuttle bus service or discounted public bus passes. On many campuses you can get help arranging ride sharing.

- Financial Aid: Don't expect to find a lot of scholarship money available to foreign students. Most financial aid in the U.S. comes from the federal government and is therefore restricted to citizens and permanent residents of the United States. Nevertheless, the financial aid office can help you determine if you are qualified for any forms of financial aid.

- Student Employment Office or Career Center: International Students who have an F-1 or J-1 visa may be eligible to work on the college campus if they meet certain conditions. Check with the foreign student advisor on your employment eligibility. If you can take a campus job, you might find one that suits you through the student employment office or career services center.

- Computing/Internet Access/Online Services: The first thing many students look for when they arrive on a new campus is a place where they can check their e-mail. Most colleges and universities offer student e-mail accounts, access to the internet, and other types of online and computer services. Some institutions even require all students to purchase their own personal computer (PC). With a PC, students can log into the library, download course syllabi, access their grades, register for classes, and even order a pizza!

- English as a Second Language (ESL): There are many different kinds of ESL programs on college and university campuses. If you need help with English, find out what is available, how much it costs, how long it lasts, and how it fits into the overall admission or course requirements.

- Student Activities: Do you like to play chess, watch movies, or go camping? Do you enjoy dancing or are you interested in getting involved in volunteer projects? The student activity office on the campus has a long list of things that you can do in your spare time. There are clubs, groups, and people with common interests on your campus. But it's your job to balance your leisure time and your study time!

- Sports, Athletics, Intramural Teams: You can be a spectator or a participant. Just choose your sport and you'll probably find it. (Even cricket players can find an outlet for their passion in many American cities!) Try something new while in America. You might really enjoy baseball!

- Testing Services: Many colleges and universities offer student the chance to sit for required tests, such as the TOEFL, GRE, GMAT, etc. Some schools even offer classes designed to prepare students for these tests. Other types of tests offered might include placement tests, aptitude tests, interest tests, GED (General Equivalency Diploma) tests, and even make-up tests (if you miss a classroom test due to illness).

- Tutoring Programs: If you find that you need extra help outside of class with mathematics, or accounting, or history, or English composition, you may be able to sign up for a tutor. Tutors are generally students who know a subject so well that they volunteer to help other students learn. Sometimes tutors are paid to help. If you are competent enough to be a tutor, you may be able to get a paid position as a tutor.

- Remedial Programs: This is a particular strength of community colleges. Students who enter the college with weak skills in English or mathematics can begin with a course below college level. These courses will prepare the student to continue in the subject and work up to college level courses.

- Honors Programs: For gifted students, participation in an honors program can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of their college career. Honors classes tend to have the best students, the best professors, and the most interesting class discussions. There may be other benefits as well. Community college honor students can join Phi Theta Kappa, an international honor society. Phi Beta Kappa is the most prestigious honor society for students in a four-year institution.

- Cultural Programs and Festivals: More and more colleges and universities sponsor international or cultural festivals. They are a wonderful opportunity for you to share your country, language, and culture with your fellow students. Find out how you can get involved in planning and promoting the event.

- Family Friendship Program: These programs offer the international students a chance to become friends with an American family. The family will invite

you to their home or take you to museums, ballgames, or tourist attractions. You will not live with the family, but you will become a close friend and may even share holidays and special occasions with them.

These are just a few of the programs, services, and activities that you can expect to find on many college and university campuses. If you have a need or an interest in any of the things on this list, it is well worth your time and effort to find out about it in advance. When you are considering which college or university to send an application to, ask about the services that you think you will need. Find out exactly what is offered, how much it costs, and whether or not it is available to international students. If you don't take advantage of a service that is provided for your benefit, the loss is yours and you have no one to blame but yourself. Your American college experience will be all the more rich and rewarding if you take full advantage of the services and programs to which you are entitled.

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